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AUTHOR Seiferth, Berniece B.
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ABSTRACT

While censorship pressures emanate from all points on the political spectrum at different times, the current censorship movement comes mostly from political conservatives. Censorship efforts by the Reagan administration include barring entry of foreign speakers whose views do not coincide with those of the administration, inhibiting the free flow of films between Canada and the United States, denying press coverage for controversial administration actions such as the invasion of Grenada, and enlarging the number of documents classified as secret. Social studies topics considered unacceptable by some present-day censor groups include women's suffrage, civil rights, America as a nation of immigrants, American Indian experiences, Watergate, slavery, and global education. These efforts by the present administration and private groups have serious implications for social studies education, which emphasizes the development of students' awareness of and ability to deal with social issues. Several techniques are open to social studies teachers trying to eliminate censorship in the classroom. Among these are awareness of teacher self-censorship, respect for parents' rights, and encouragement of a clearly stated district policy on censorship. (LP)

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CENSORSHIP: CHALLENGES, CONCERNS AND CURES

by
Berniece B. Seiferth

Professor of Education
Dept. of Curriculum Instruction
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, Illinois 62901

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Censorship: Challenges, Concerns and Cures

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> The freedom of which we boast is not lost in shattered Dunkirks and blazing Pearl Harbours...such events call forth the utmost resistance. Freedom is lost little by little in noiseless theft, a fragment of concession to expediency here, a morsel of 'what does it matter' there. Then, shockingly, we find that freedom has disappeared in the regimentation of not only our daily doings but our eternal ambitions.
>
> The Royal Bank of Canada Monthly Newsletter, January, 1966.

A censor is defined as a person whose task is to examine literature, motion pictures, etc., and to remove or prohibit anything considered unsuitable. In education, it refers to a person or group with the authority to decide what will or will not be taught. Censorship may be the work of a state board of education or local school board, a superintendent or principal, or a teacher or librarian. In too many instances today, the censors claim to know right from wrong because they know what God wants. And it's hard to argue with God.

Senator Robert Packwood warned: "God does not speak to any of us today and say, 'You are right and those who disagree with you are wrong.' If any of us thinks God has ordained us to speak for him, we are wrong. Worse, if we are in positions of power and believe we speak for God, we become dangerous."

What is the emphasis of censorship? What is its impact on teachers of social studies? The movement, now extensive and influential, comes mostly from conservatives, but to some degree censorship is felt from all points on the political spectrum, right, left, and center. At times this action even appears to place some feminists and conservatives in the same camp since both wish to

censor pornography and sexism.

The National Chairman of the Stop Textbook Censorship Committee, a conservative group so named because they feel present textbooks have been censored already by liberal groups, is Terry Todd. She states, "If we could stop the censorship of textbooks as it regards family values, the role of parents, wives and mothers, the respect for our nation as a good nation and for capitalism as a responsible free enterprise, then we would have an adequate solution to our problems."

And so from Miami to the Northwest and from New England to the Sunbelt, the fight goes on over what we may see, hear, say, read, and write. Since President Reagan was elected in November 1980, censorship attempts have risen by about 300%, according to the American Library Association. In just four months after the election, 148 books in 34 states came under attack. Should ideas be allowed to be discussed in classrooms across America or should students be protected from them? Lee Burress, a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin has conducted nationwide censorship surveys since 1966. He concludes: "We can't have a decent society if a small group of people are going to dictate what the rest of us can read or watch." According to Judith Krug of the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom, more than 1,000 censorship attempts were reported to the association last school year, compared to 300 in 1979-80. She agrees with Burress by stating that our constitutional republic strives to preserve the full marketplace of ideas, including minority views and beliefs.

Just 50 years ago on May 10, 1933, 40,000 people applauded as German students burned more than 20,000 books and pamphlets, representing such authors as Albert Einstein, Jack London, Helen Keller and Marcel Proust--for

holding "alien thought." Prominent speakers in our own country who recently have faced heckling while trying to express their views include Jeane Kirkpatrick, Phyllis Schlafly, Sheik Yamani and Eldridge Cleaver. In other words, one of our constitutional guarantees, freedom of speech, was being denied these speakers. Our government also got into the act by denying a visa to the widow of former President Allende of Chile to speak at Stanford University and to church groups, and ordered Georgi Arbatov, the Soviet's leading expert on American affairs, not to have contact with reporters while on a visit to America.

A sampling of censorship directly related to social studies textbooks includes these gems from Mel and Norma Gabler's Educational Research Analysts, one of the three major groups of censors:

> Textbook Material: a discussion of the civil rights movement and the slogan, "Freedom!" Objection: Everyone in this country has always been free unless they were in jail.
>
> Textbook Material: description of America as a nation of immigrants from other countries. Objection: presents a derogatory view of America that does not foster patriotism.
>
> Textbook Material: all discussion of women's contributions to history. Objection: undermines women's traditional roles.

Also in Wyoming, the Family Rights Forum filed suit to stop use of a history textbook. Reason? The book was anti-family because not all women were depicted as homemakers! Jerry Falwell has labelled most textbooks as Soviet propaganda. Here is a sample of other topics unacceptable to the Radical Religious Right pertaining to social studies:

-women's suffrage and the current women's movement
-American Indian experiences

-Watergate experiences
-values clarification
-slavery in America
-the labor movement
-ecology/world hunger
-Global education

We have had statements such as these from former presidents. John F. Kennedy boldly proclaimed: "A nation that is afraid to let its people judge truth and falsehood in an open market is a nation that is afraid of its people." And Dwight Eisenhower agreed with Kennedy when he warned: "Don't join the book burners. Don't think you are going to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they ever existed. Don't be afraid to go in your library and read every book as long as any document does not offend your own ideas of decency. That should be the only censorship."

Let us contrast those views with the fear of thinking which results in censorship attempts from the present administration. Only a listing of a few will suffice:

1. Repeated efforts to weaken the Freedom of Information Act by limiting its coverage and setting fees for obtaining documents.
2. Barring entry of foreign speakers whose views do not coincide with those of the administration.
3. Inhibiting the free flow of films to the United States, specifically the three from Canada on medical effects of nuclear war and acid rain.
4. Enlarging the number of classified "secret" documents in the system.
5. Ordering lie detector tests for government workers to include a minimum of 113,000 persons.
6. Denying press coverage for the invasion of Grenada, even though reporters were briefed 10 days before the Normandy Invasion, certainly a more significant event in history.

7. Issuing the gag rule.

The secrecy order of the present government would cut off democratic debate on many critical issues. For example, after President Reagan's "Star Wars" speech, the Washington Post published three articles on his proposal of a futuristic laser beam defense against enemy missiles. One of the articles was by current Undersecretary of Defense Fred Ikle, who supported the idea. The other two were by former Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, and former Undersecretary of Defense, William Perry, who criticized it. If the new executive order had been in effect at the time, the former officials would have had to clear their articles first, possibly by the very man they were debating.

The extent to which this secrecy order could be applied is frightening, to say the least. Walter Mondale would be compelled to have his articles or speeches cleared by the government, and former officials as high ranking as Henry Kissinger or President Carter would have to submit for approval all their writings and speeches by their successors.

What is the moral of all this for teachers of social studies? Can any of you think of subjects taught in our public schools where teachers need to be more aware of the dangers of censorship than in social studies? At stake is not just the removal of certain texts or teaching materials but the very substance on which our democracy is founded. As Americans, we believe that our nation was committed to the conviction that people of many religious beliefs, political ideas and personal talents can live and work together peacefully and productively, despite their profound differences. Instead, Philip Blackwell stated: "We now have a climate of fear, retribution and distrust nurtured and exploited by the religious new right."

Senator Edward M. Kennedy echoed these thoughts when he emphasized in a speech at Liberty Baptist College, operated by the Rev. Jerry Falwell: "We

must respect the motives of those who exercise their rights to disagree. We sorely test our ability to live together if we too readily question each other's integrity." In the same speech he asked that we respect the policy of public debate, and cease mindless name-calling.

As social studies teachers, we want students to be able to think, read, and learn, while the most active censors want indoctrination to their personal moral majoritarian ideology or mind control. One radical religious right group warned teachers not to discuss the future, political or social issues, nor ask any "what do you think?" questions. This is non-think at its worst, and leads to doublespeak mentality, such as "revenue enhancement" (higher taxes)." "Advanced downward adjustment" equates with spending cuts, a "rescue mission" is an invasion of Grenada, and "air support" is bombing. George Orwell in 1984 said government will have three slogans, "War is peace," "freedom is slavery," and "ignorance is strength." What do you think?

The former president of the National Council for the Social Studies, Carole Hahn, feels that social studies have the unique obligation to ensure that the students will be prepared to meet complex economic, political, and environmental problems they will encounter as adults, and in order to do so, they must examine today the important and controversial issues in society. In one of Hahn's research projects, she found that students who participated in open discussions of controversial issues are the ones who hold attitudes most needed by keep democracy going.

Finally, what can social studies do to eliminate censorship from their classrooms? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Beware of self-censorship because you are afraid of the consequences of teaching controversial topics.

2. Make yourself aware of what the censors are charging when they say "secular humanism" is being taught in your classroom. No one yet has been able to verify it!
3. Understand the series of NCSS position statements which assert the importance of value analysis and controversial issues discussions as support for what you are teaching.
4. Respect the rights of parents to censor what their own children can be exposed to but don't let them influence what others may learn.
5. Try to get your school system to provide some definite policies for teaching controversial issues before the need arises to use them.